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ABSTRACT

A report is given on the second phase of a 3-year study on change in American high schools. Data are presented from 17 schools for two of the study questions: What types of changes are occurring and what are the key units of change? Information was collected through approximately 28 hours of interviews in each school with students, faculty, and administrators. Additionally, the kinds of changes being proposed in some of the major national and state commission reports were analyzed and compared with the changes underway in the study schools. The changes identified in the study were divided into three categories: schoolwide, subunits, and individual. The kinds of changes being made involved: (1) changes related to regularly scheduled curriculum or instruction; (2) changes in school-sponsored activities that are not a part of regularly scheduled curriculum; (3) changes directed at school personnel; (4) administrative changes; (5) changes in school facilities; and (6) changes in school relations with external groups. Data from findings in each of these areas are presented in tables. Findings indicate that major changes are not being made in the structure or organization of the schools, or in the processes of schooling. A majority of changes were directed specifically to improving student achievement. (JD)

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WHAT IS HAPPENING - WHAT IS WANTED

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CHANGES IN HIGH SCHOOLS: WHAT IS HAPPENING - WHAT IS WANTED[1,2]

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Background and Purpose of the Research

Depending on where one begins and what one counts, it would be possible to identify twenty or more recent reports from national or state level committees or commissions that focus on the problems and needs of American high schools. No matter which reports are considered, the clarion call of each one is for action, for change, and for improvement in schools. To be sure, there is considerable variation in what the reports perceive the problems of the high schools to be and in the changes they propose. But, the reports are unanimous in their contention that high schools must change for the better. Many of the reports either imply or state outright that high schools have changed little in decades. This same sentiment is also expressed in the professional literature (Ducharme, 1982; Wood, John, and Poden, 1984). The inference drawn from these positions is that getting high schools to change will be a difficult task.

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[1]The research described herein was conducted under contract with the National Institute of Education. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the National Institute of Education. No endorsement by the National Institute of Education should be inferred.

[2]Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April, 1984.

Are high schools really rigid and imperious to change? For more than a year researchers at the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education at the University of Texas have been studying change in American high schools. This research was planned to cover a range of schools and situations over a three year period. Phase I, conducted in 1982-83, was an exploratory effort in which researchers visited 11 selected schools to become familiar with the high school context and to pilot data collection methodologies and specific interview questions. The study is currently in Phase II, a descriptive investigation of a national sample of 18 schools dispersed across the nation and representing urban, suburban, rural and mid-size city schools. Phase III will be an intensive year-long investigation of the change process and how it is managed in a small number of selected high schools.

Four basic study questions related to change in high schools are the focus of Phase II of this study. They include:

1) What are the types, sources and purposes of changes in high schools?

2) What are the key units of change?

3) What are the key situational factors that influence the change process?

4) How is the change process managed in high schools?

This paper presents data from seventeen of the eighteen Phase II study schools for two of the study questions: What types of changes are occurring and what are the key units of change? Data were collected through approximately 28 hours of interviews in each school with students, faculty and administrators.[3] Additionally, the kinds of changes being proposed in some of

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[3]It is acknowledged that only a portion of the faculty, administrators and students of any school were interviewed. However, the cross-checking process used in the interviews convince the researchers that additional interviews would not have modified the patterns of change that were identified.

the major national and state commission reports were analyzed and compared with the changes that were discovered as being underway in the study schools. The reports that were considered for this aspect of the study are listed in the bibliography under Education Reports.

Figure 1 presents the coding system used to classify the recent and proposed changes into six categories and multiple subcategories. These categories and subcategories evolved from the data collected in this and other studies of change in schools (Hall, Hord, Huling, Rutherford and Stiegelbauer, 1983; Hall and Hord, 1984).

Defining and Analyzing Changes

Defining Change

Arriving at a definition of change has been and continues to be a dilemma. The dilemma is in deciding which factors are critical and should be used in defining and/or distinguishing changes. A school makes a change in the math department head, they increase the eligibility standards for participation in extra-curricular activities, they add an advance placement course in English and the district introduces into all schools a program to improve the instructional skills of all teachers. A large number of Vietnamese students move into the area. These are all changes but obviously they differ in several ways.

These changes differ on at least the following factors: a) the person, persons or entity that is the target of the change, b) the number of persons influenced by it, c) the source or impetus of the change, d) the complexity of the change in terms of use, e) the difficulty of implementing it, f) the potential short term impact, and g) the potential long term impact. With these factors (and there are others) in mind, the question can be asked,

"Which of the four changes mentioned above should be included in the data set for this study and on what basis will the decision be made?"

Since the answer to that question has not yet been decided, the changes in the data set include any and all changes that were initiated during the last two years and that were reported by the study subjects. A task for the future is to design a technique for analyzing changes that will account for the differences in those changes in some meaningful way.

Analyzing Changes

At each site, the interviews were tape recorded so that it was possible to relisten to each tape and extract each and every change that was mentioned by the interviewees. At the end of the first of the two days of interviews, the two researchers working in a school would debrief each other, one purpose being to cross check the changes each one had identified and to clarify the details surrounding the change. If there was any doubt or confusion about a change, it would be checked further and clarified during the second day of interviewing.

After completing the interviews and returning to the R&D Center, the two researchers from each school would listen to their tapes and refer to notes taken during the two days to identify the changes mentioned. Once again, the two researchers cross checked with each other.

Once the reported changes were identified, they were coded for a variety of purposes. All of the purposes are described and discussed by Huling (1984). For this paper, the data were analyzed for two purposes, to determine the unit of change and to determine what kind or type of change it was. Each change was coded for kind using the coding scheme in Figure 1 and they were assigned to one of four units, individual, subunit, schoolwide or districtwide. More details on these units are presented below.

Researchers, for each school, first coded their changes independently and then their data sets were merged so that any change identified by both researchers was counted as only one change. After this was done, the data from the seventeen individual schools was combined into a single data set that forms the basis for this paper.

Findings

Recent Changes

A total of 380 changes had taken place or were in progress in the seventeen study schools for an average of 22.4 per school. The interviews with students, faculty, staff and administrators focused on changes occurring in the schools during the past two years so this number includes only recent changes. Changes intended to influence curriculum or instruction (33.4%) and changes classified as Administration/Organization (33.7%) represented about two-thirds of all the changes identified. Ranked third in number of changes was the category of Student Non-Academic Development (20.5%) These three categories include 87.6 percent of the total number of identified changes that had been recently introduced into the study schools. Only 6.3 percent of the changes were classified in the category of Professional/Personal Performance and changes in the categories of External Relations and School Facilities amounted to 6.1 percent of the total.

In several instances the differences within a category are as marked as the differences between categories. Within the Curriculum and Instruction category, changes related to a review or revision of the curriculum (10C) accounted for approximately 70 per cent of the changes, while changes directed at procedures and processes for instruction (10I) represented only 11 per cent of the category total. Many of the curriculum changes were related to the

introduction of computers into existing classes. This is being done most frequently in business classes and second most frequently in math courses. If a new and separate course in computer literacy was established, that was coded 11, but this had happened in only three of the seventeen schools. The introduction of the latest in office equipment in business classes also resulted in a number of curriculum changes to accommodate their use.

Instructional changes were most often related to new teaching approaches to accommodate special education students or efforts to improve teaching performance through the use of some system for monitoring and guiding teaching behavior such as the systems proposed by Madeline Hunter.

From these data in the Curriculum and Instruction category, several facts become clear. The number of curriculum changes (10C) was more than six times greater than changes directed at the improvement of teaching procedures (10I). The number of changes in this latter area (3.7%) is very similar to the number of changes (3.9%) intended to influence teacher professional performance (subcategory #30). Collectively, the number of changes made to directly influence the performance of teachers (10I and 30) represents less than 10 percent of the 380 changes identified.

In the category of Administration/Organization (21.9%) most of those changes involved matters of staffing and scheduling. Only three changes were of significant magnitude to be classified as organization reform[4] (#44) and these were related to the conversion of a regular high school to a special high school serving only students bused in for a few hours each day and the transfer of the student body to other schools in the district.

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[4]To be classified as an organizational reform, a change must represent a significant restructuring of the school as an organization as compared with a modification in the existing organization.

Changes in the third largest category, Student Non-Academic Development, were rather evenly distributed among the three subcategories. Changes to manage or control student behavior were usually either discipline policy or attendance policy changes. Special, short-term programs for students such as CPR or substance abuse were typical of the changes made to benefit student welfare/attitudes. There was no one pattern to the extra-curriculum changes, but there was widespread concern about minimizing disruptions in the school day caused by extra-curricular activities.

Unit of Change/Unit of Adoption

The changes identified in the study were divided into three classifications; schoolwide, subunits and individual. If a change involved all or most of the faculty of a school, the unit of change was schoolwide. When a change involved one faculty group within the school, such as a department or all teachers of honors courses, the unit of change was termed subunit. Individual units of change were those changes made by individual teachers in their own classrooms without involving other teachers. Of the 380 identified changes, 54.4 percent were schoolwide while subunits were the unit of change in 28.6 percent of the cases. An individual was the unit of change in 17 percent of the cases.

A fourth unit of change cuts across each of the other three units and that unit is districtwide. A change that involved all faculty in all schools in the district was both a districtwide and schoolwide change. For example, if all math departments within the district made the same change, then it was a districtwide and subunit change. Should each French teacher in every high school engage in the same change, then it is a districtwide and individual change.

The analysis of data is still underway, but one finding already seems apparent. It appears that more changes in individual schools have been initiated from outside the school than from within. Most frequently, the impetus for these changes appears to be the district office. These changes may be programs or processes district level personnel have developed themselves or it may be ones developed outside the district and then adopted by the district. This done, they then expect all schools to implement that change.

Findings relative to the units of change were a bit surprising to the researchers, for the literature on high schools and popular opinion among those who know high schools infers that the centers of authority and directions are the subject matter units or departments, and these departments are fairly autonomous. This perspective suggests that the primary unit of change would be the department. These data indicate this is not the case. Departments or similar subunits were the adopting unit of change in less than one-third of all changes with schoolwide and individual changes accounting for a combined total of more than two-thirds of the recent changes in high schools.

High School Changes Proposed By Commission Reports

It is clear that there is much change underway in American high schools but how do these changes compare with those being proposed in the commission reports that are receiving widespread attention? To answer this question nine national commission reports and a commission report from the state of Texas that have received significant attention in the literature and media were selected for analysis. (These reports are listed in the bibliography.) From the ten reports a total of 184 proposed changes were identified. These proposed changes were analyzed with the same analysis system applied to the

Figure 1

KINDS OF CHANGES IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Curriculum/Instruction (includes changes related to regularly scheduled curriculum or instruction)

- 10I influencing instruction procedures
- 10C review or revise curriculum
- 11. introduce new course
- 19. other

Student Non-Academic Development (includes changes in school sponsored activities that are not a part of regularly scheduled curriculum)

- 20. managing or controlling student behavior
- 21. influencing student welfare/attitudes
- 22. extra-curriculum
- 29. other

Professional/Personal Performance (includes changes directed at school personnel that influence their work in the high school)

- 30. influence teacher professional performance
- 31. influence administrator performance
- 32. influence teacher welfare and personal development
- 33. teacher preparation/recruitment
- 34. teacher selection, assignment and retention
- 39. other

Administration/Organization (administrative changes are those directed at the ongoing management of the school or district; organizational changes include significant restructuring of school as an organization)

- 40. staffing, scheduling, planning, etc.
- 41. influence operational efficiency
- 42. new guidelines/standards
- 43. change in contextual factors, i.e. enrollment, make-up of student population, finances
- 44. organization reform
- 49. other

School Facilities (includes changes in building, grounds, furnishings, etc.)

- 50. change for instruction
- 51. change for esthetics
- 59. other

External Relations (includes changes in ways in which the school relates to external groups apart from the school district)

- 60. public relations
- 61. communications
- 69. other

changes identified in the study high schools (Figure 1). Results from this analysis are presented in Figure 3 along with the data on recent changes in high schools that were provided in Figure 2.

More than 81 percent of the proposed changes fall within three categories. Professional/Personal Performance (32%), Administration/Organization (28.4%) and External Relations (21.2%). Among the other categories, Curriculum/Instruction had 16.8 per cent of the total and Student Non-Academic Development 1.6% per cent. No changes were proposed for School Facilities.

Subcategories within the categories provide insight into the specific kinds of changes that have been proposed. In the Professional/Personal Performance category, which was an area of much publicity in the commission reports, the majority of the proposals were for changes in the preparation and recruitment of teachers (#33). Most often these were directed at colleges and universities, but they also included cadet teacher programs in high schools and the recruitment of teachers in shortage areas from sources other than schools of education. Proposals related to merit pay, career ladders and other incentive programs for teachers were classified under subcategory #30 if they were linked to teacher performance or under subcategory #34 if they were for the purpose of retaining teachers without connection to specific performance requirements. Together, these categories account for only 9.3 percent of the total and some of those changes are related to teacher selection and performance. So in spite of all the talk about different plans for rewarding teachers, there are a limited number of specific proposals directed to that end.

Under the Administration/Organization category, the greatest number of changes are in subcategory 40 and most frequently relate to scheduling of courses within the curriculum sequence and the allocation of time during the

Figure 2

RECENT CHANGES IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Category	Recent Changes in High Schools	
	Raw Total	Percent of Total
Curriculum/Instruction		
101 influencing instruction procedures	14	3.7
10C review or revise curriculum	89	23.4
11. introduce new course	24	6.3
19. other	0	0
Subtotals	127	33.4
Student Non-Academic Development		
20. managing or controlling student behavior	30	7.9
21. influencing student welfare/ attitudes	29	7.6
22. extra-curriculum	19	5.0
29. other	0	0
Subtotals	78	20.5
Professional/Personal Performance		
30. influence teacher professional performance	15	3.9
31. influence administrator performance	3	.8
32. influence teacher welfare and personal development	5	1.3
33. teacher preparation/recruitment	0	0
34. teacher selection, assignment and retention	0	0
39. other	1	.3
Subtotals	24	6.3
Administration/Organization		
40. staffing, scheduling, planning, etc.	83	21.9
41. influence operational efficiency	21	5.5
42. new guidelines/standards	10	2.6
43. change in contextual factors, i.e. enrollment, make-up of student population, finances	8	2.1
44. organization reform	4	.8
49. other	2	.8
Subtotals	128	33.7
School Facilities		
50. change for instruction	4	1.05
51. change for esthetics	4	1.05
59. other	1	.3
Subtotals	9	2.4
External Relations		
60. public relations	5	1.3
61. communications	9	2.4
69. other	14	3.7
Subtotals	28	7.4
Totals	380	100

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day. Proposals for changes in standards or guidelines (#42) made up 7.6 percent of the total. These are most frequently directed at graduation requirements or allocation of funds for special programs or groups of students. Of the total number of Administration/Organization changes proposed, 6.6 percent of them called for changes of significant magnitude to be classified as organization reform (#44). These include such changes as organizing schools into three major vertical units that would encompass all school grades and would limit the number of pupils per unit or the establishment of special learning academies for students who cannot learn in the regular program or a one track curriculum without electives.

Most of the proposed changes under External Relations are classified as Other (#69) because they represent a variety of suggestions about the kinds of relationships that should be established between schools and the federal and state governments and private business and industry.

Two final subcategories of note are 10C and 10I. Subcategory 10C shows that 11.4 percent of the proposed changes call for some type of curriculum change, but only 4.4 percent are directed at improving instruction.

Comparing Changes Proposed and Changes Already Initiated

Numerical and graphic comparisons of recent changes in high schools and those being proposed are displayed in Figures 3 and 4, respectively. Recent changes in high schools are most numerous in two categories, one of them being Curriculum/Instruction (33.4%), but proposed changes in this area constitute only 16.8 percent of the total. However, both sources give much greater attention to changes in curriculum (10C) than to changes directed at influencing instructional procedures (10I). These data reflect a philosophy that has dominated education at least since the 1960's, that is, the way to improve education is to change the curriculum rather than changing the way teachers

Figure 3

PROPOSED AND RECENT CHANGES IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Category	Proposed Changes in High Schools		Recent Changes in High Schools	
	Raw Total	Percent of Total	Raw Total	Percent of Total
Curriculum/Instruction				
101 influencing instruction procedures	8	4.4	14	3.7
10C review or revise curriculum	21	11.4	89	23.4
11. introduce new course	1	.5	24	6.3
19. other	1	.5	0	0
Subtotals	31	16.8	127	33.4
Student Non-Academic Development				
20. managing or controlling student behavior	2	1.1	30	7.9
21. influencing student welfare/attitudes	1	.5	29	7.6
22. extra-curriculum	0	0	19	5.0
29. other	0	0	0	0
Subtotals	3	1.6	78	20.5
Professional/Personal Performance				
30. influence teacher professional performance	8	4.4	15	3.9
31. influence administrator performance	5	2.7	3	.8
32. influence teacher welfare and personal development	3	1.6	5	1.3
33. teacher preparation/recruitment	33	17.9	0	0
34. teacher selection, assignment and retention	9	4.9	0	0
39. other	1	.5	1	.3
Subtotals	59	32.0	24	6.3
Administration/Organization				
40. staffing, scheduling, planning, etc.	22	12.0	83	21.9
41. influence operational efficiency	4	2.2	21	5.5
42. new guidelines/standards	14	7.6	10	2.6
43. change in contextual factors, i.e. enrollment, make-up of student population, finances	0	0	8	2.1
44. organization reform	12	6.6	4	.8
49. other	0	0	2	.8
Subtotals	52	28.4	128	33.7
School Facilities				
50. change for instruction	0	0	4	1.05
51. change for esthetics	0	0	4	1.05
59. other	0	0	1	.3
Subtotals	0	0	9	2.4
External Relations				
60. public relations	6	3.2	5	1.3
61. communications	0	0	9	2.4
69. other	33	18.0	14	3.7
Subtotals	39	21.2	28	7.4
Totals	184	100	380	100

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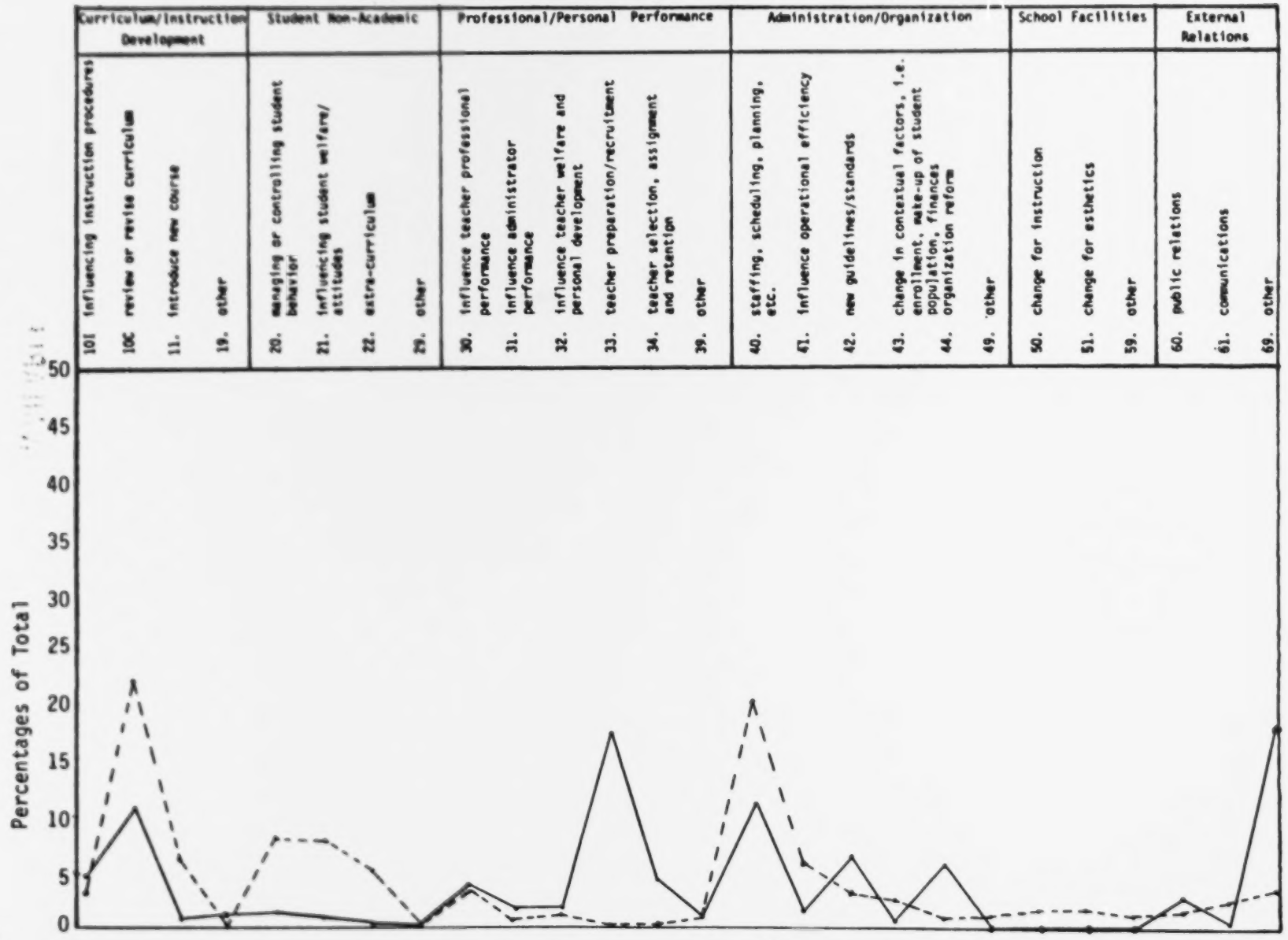
Figure 4
Graphic Comparison of Recent and Proposed Changes[5]



[5]A scale of only 50 percent is used since no category exceeded that percent.

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teach. It should be noted that a number of the recent changes in schools relate to increased or anticipated increases in graduation requirements or to the introduction of new technology.

Proposed changes for the purpose of Student Non-Academic Development represents less than 2 percent of the total, while actual school changes in this area constitute 20.5 percent of the total. Schools seem to feel that if they are going to increase academic achievement they must have students in school and with behavior appropriate for learning, thus they are establishing programs and procedures to accomplish this. These include stricter policies regarding school attendance, tardiness and student behavior. In many of the study schools, steps were being taken to minimize the interruptions in the academic day caused by extra curriculum activities in response to the increasing criticism of those activities.

Professional/Personal Performance is the target of far more proposed changes (32%) than actual changes (6.3%). However, a careful look at the two data sets reveal they are not as different as may seem. More than one-half of the proposed changes have to do with the recruitment and training of prospective teachers. Apparently, high schools do not see this as being within their scope of responsibilities, so they have made no changes in this area. However, the two sources differed very little with regard to changes intended to influence Teacher Professional Performance (#30) and Administrator Performance (#31). The relatively small number of proposed or actual changes to influence teacher professional development is consonant with the figures for subcategory 10I, influencing instructional procedures. The two categories combined represent less than 10 percent of the total for both recent and proposed changes. In both the proposed and recent changes, curriculum certainly receives more attention than teachers and teaching. Given the

number of recent studies that have shown clearly the importance of the school administrator in school improvement, it is disappointing to note how few changes, proposed (2.7%) or actual (.8%), are directed to improving administrator's performance.

In the Administration/Organization category, the greatest number of proposed and actual changes was directed at the traditional administrative tasks of staffing, scheduling and planning, almost always in relation to curriculum offerings. The number of changes schools have made that are large enough to be considered reforms, (as opposed to shifts in the traditional) were only 3 and all 3 of these came from one district where major reductions in the student population made it necessary to take significant actions to cope with the problem. From these data, it can be inferred that major reforms in high schools are not likely to be initiated at school or district level. Perhaps the risks are just too great for administrators to take. On the other hand, only 6.6 percent of the proposed changes called for some type of reform in schools. Perhaps high schools are not in need of reform, or they are impervious to reform, or perhaps those who have proposed changes are so linked with high schools they cannot conceive of how they might really be different.

Changes in the School Facilities category were apparently of no concern to the various commissions and received only minor attention from the schools themselves.

In the category of External Relations there is a large difference in the proposed changes (21.2%) and actual changes (3.7%). This difference is due to the large number of recommendations made for how the federal and state governments and private business and industry should come to the aid of schools.

The proposed changes reflect a growing sentiment that schools must have increased support if they are to make the improvements desired.

Reflections on the Findings

Are high schools changing? Yes and no. If one is asking whether there are massive reforms underway that drastically affect the processes and activities that occur in high schools or in the purposes that high schools are expected to fulfill, then the answer is "no". Major changes in the structure or organization of high schools are not being made nor are their substantive changes in the processes of schooling. They are not making these kinds of changes. However, if one is asking if high schools are sensitive to and responding to local, regional and nationally highlighted problems, such as falling achievement test scores, the answer is "yes". The seventeen schools that compared the data base for this paper averaged 22.4 changes per school during the past two years. A majority of these changes were directed specifically at the improvement of student achievement. But, many others were made in response to contemporary demands on schools for things such as computer literacy, knowledge of the latest in business machines, drug awareness, responsibility in parenting and maximum educational opportunities for special education students.

Clearly, are not now involved in major reforms. But neither are high schools Asleep at the Wheel (Hall, Hord, Rutherford & Huling, 1984). They are aware of the problems of national concern addressed in the commission reports and are making efforts to respond to those problems. At the same time, they are attempting to respond to the many other contemporary problems of society that are continually brought to them for a solution. In this sense, high schools are amazingly responsive; perhaps even too responsive. As one researcher noted when working with the study data, "From the looks of all of

the changes going on, it appears that high schools will try to implement almost anything."

What is particularly interesting is that, for the most part, the recommendations from the national and state reports do not call for major educational reform. Rather, the recommendations are for adjustments in the existing organization, processes of schooling, and purposes of the high school. Recommendations to lengthen the school day or school year, or change the number of preparations per day teachers will make, or to increase graduation requirements are hardly earthshaking. Recommendations for developing schools within schools, or organizing education into three levels or refusing students entrance into high school, regardless of age, until they master basic educational requirements, or establishing a single track curriculum might be considered reforms, for they might significantly alter the organization and process of education. However, even these suggestions presuppose that schooling in high schools will take place in classrooms located in buildings called schools, staffed by traditional teachers and administrators, with students expected to be physically present for certain hours of the day for so many days of the year. Even those few recommendations that call for different ways of teaching and different ways of learning see this happening within the traditional school setting. A possible exception to this sameness might be found in some of the recommendations made by Sizer in Horace's Compromise. The personalization of education as emphasized in that report would require great flexibility in the scheduling of a high school day and the duration of a student's high career.

It is difficult to know exactly how much change is being recommended in the actual purposes of high schools. Of the four purposes high schools are historically assumed to fulfill; custodial, socialization, knowledge

dissemination and preparation for work, the latter two are receiving the most attention at this time. The emphasis on a return to the basics accentuates the knowledge dissemination purpose of schools. On the other hand, there is considerable concern expressed in some of the reports regarding the role and value of vocational education, that aspect of schooling related most directly to preparation for work. Whether this suggests that schools should not prepare students for work or whether it means other ways of preparing students for work are more desirable is not clear. Proposals to lengthen school days and school years will increase the custodial responsibilities of schools so it is apparent that purpose remains unchanged. Very little is stated or implied in the various reports about the socialization function of schooling, so it can be assumed that this purpose of schooling will continue.

When the current pattern of changes in high schools is considered along with the changes proposed in the commission reports several trends for change during the next decade becomes evident. The curriculum in high schools will give increased emphasis to educational technology, to the core academic subjects and to gifted learners. Receiving decreased emphasis will be extra-curricular activities and the more traditional vocational training programs. At the same time there is no evidence that there will be any real changes in high schools in terms of organization, functions, staffing and the basic processes of schooling. This means that high schools will change in the years ahead but they will not be reformed. However, because change is not readily visible to outside observers, in ten or so years there is sure to be an article written in which the author looks back over the previous decade and proclaims that in spite of the fervor over the commission reports high schools remain virtually unchanged.

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